

Capitalism’s ‘natural’ disasters

Continued from front page

low-lying, densely populated areas in New York and New Jersey were badly flooded.

For decades state and city governments have directed planning and development for working-class housing to precisely these areas, where two major hurricanes in 1893 and 1938 caused massive flooding and devastation. Much of the city’s public housing, home to 400,000 working people, was built on waterfronts in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens beginning in the 1930s.

In the 1950s the city started building high-rise projects in the Rockaways area of Queens, one of the largest flood-prone sections of the city. In 1975 the Rockaways contained 57 percent of the borough’s low-income housing, but only 5 percent of its population.

Over time, people with steady incomes were encouraged to leave to make room for those on public assistance. To the propertied rulers in New York and the government officials who run the city on their behalf, the Rockaways’ distant location made it an ideal destination for the lowest-income, jobless, infirm and elderly sections of the working class, which they view with contempt. “After World War II, Rockaway was essentially treated as a dumping ground,” Lawrence Kaplan, co-author of *Between Ocean and City: The Transformation of Rockaway, New York*, said to the *New York Times* Dec. 3.

The projects were soon joined by facilities for recently deinstitutionalized mental patients and high-rise nursing homes. Today, half of the city’s nursing home facilities are in the Rockaways,

many sitting right on the oceanfront.

The 21 people who drowned in the storm surge on Staten Island were concentrated along the south shore, where the most recent large-scale construction was done in the late 1980s and early ’90s, when the city cleared the building of hundreds of closely-packed condominiums and master-planned communities just feet from the high-tide line.

Developers have built more than 2,700 mostly residential units on the island in areas at extreme risk of storm surge flooding between 1980 and 2008, with the approval of city planning and zoning authorities.

In a 2010 report, the New York State Sea Level Rise Task Force wrote that the state should “reduce incentives that increase or perpetuate development in high-risk locations.”

But the New York City Mayor’s Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability dissented in a response. “The draft recommendations could result in a policy of disinvestment in and promote relocation from existing urban areas. This would have dire economic and environmental consequences for the city and the state.”

Ocean County, N.J., home to devastated communities like Seaside Heights and Toms River, has been one of the fastest growing counties in the state. Between 1980 and 2010, the county’s population increased nearly 70 percent, from 346,000 to nearly 577,000. Today 60 percent of New Jersey’s population lives in coastal communities.

Patterns of working-class housing are determined by the capitalist law of value: land prices and rent are lower in flood-prone or otherwise danger-



Above: AP Photo/Bullit Marquez. Right: Getty Images/Spencer Platt

Above: Residents make way through flooded area on Philippine island of Mindanao, Dec. 5, day after typhoon hit. Right: Neighborhood in Rockaway section of Queens, Oct. 30, day after Hurricane Sandy made landfall.

ous or unhealthy areas. But through a bourgeois lens, working people simply choose to live in such areas and therefore assume the risk for which they are individually responsible.

“People who live along the shore always live with a risk, and they know that. That’s understood,” Larry Ragonese, spokesperson for New Jersey’s Department of Environmental Protection, told the *Huffington Post* Nov. 12, adding that it is not the state’s role to dictate how redevelopment should occur. (Of course governments do play a role in this regard, just not in favor of workers.)

Typhoon hits Philippines

On Dec. 4 Typhoon Bopha slammed the Philippines, a semicolonial island nation in South Asia with a population of 100 million. Winds up to 100 miles an hour were accompanied by torrential rains.

More than 900 people are reported dead and close to 1,000 missing. Nearly 5.5 million are affected and 80,000 are still in evacuation centers.

Deaths are concentrated to an impoverished, mountainous agricultural and gold mining area crisscrossed by rivers on the eastern coast of Mindanao, the country’s southern island.

Thousands of people live in shanties on river banks and islands. More than 20,000 have settled on the mountainsides in recent years digging for gold. They’ve built hundreds of makeshift tunnels with small processing plants. Extensive logging has led to deforestation, greatly exacerbating the area’s vulnerability to floods.

In the heavy rains the mountainsides were washed away by landslides, taking houses, roads and bridges with them and burying everything in mud. Entire villages were wiped out, banana plantations destroyed and coconut trees struck down, many ripped up by their roots. Most people who died either drowned or were hit by falling trees or debris flying around.

New Bataan, the hardest-hit city, with a population of 45,000, was built in 1968 in an area classified as “highly susceptible to flooding and landslides.”

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Submissions to the *Militant* may be published in the newspaper in print and digital format. By submitting, authors represent that their submissions are original and consent to publication in this manner.

Signed articles by contributors do not necessarily represent the *Militant*’s views. These are expressed in editorials.

THE MILITANT

No worker has to die on the job!

From garment factories in South Asia to coal mines in the U.S. and New Zealand to chemical plants in Quebec—only workers themselves have an interest in safe working conditions. Only their organization and use of union power can enforce them.



AP Photo/Ashrafal Alam Tito
Protest Dhaka, Bangladesh, Nov. 27 after fire killed 120 workers in garment factory.

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Subscription campaign

Continued from front page

Each of the last four weeks has been better than the one before—in the last two weeks alone, nearly 900 subscriptions were sold, overwhelmingly by going door to door in working-class neighborhoods.

With the several-day extension to send in subscriptions announced last week, a number of areas are fighting for their quotas. Others are pushing to go over to help fight for the international goal.

“We made it,” Jacquie Henderson wrote from Houston. “And our 150th subscriber, who we met going door to door tonight, is going to sell the paper with us tomorrow. The most fun in decades!”

“*Militant* distributors in London have now sold 209 subscriptions of our goal of 200. Of these, we have sold 124 going door to door three to four times a week,” Paul Davies reported.

“We are at 146 subscriptions for Canada, over our increased goal of 145,” Bev Bernardo wrote from Montreal.

“We have now sold 94 subscriptions—over our goal of 90. We have sales planned for the week leading up to the Christmas weekend. We will let you know what else we sell,” wrote Joanne Kuniansky from Sydney.

With 10 subscriptions to go toward their goal of 450, distributors in New York decided to raise their quota to 460.

“The politicians are making laws that hurt working people while they get their support from wealthy corporations. I want to read about what is really going on with this,” said Melvin Roberts, an Amtrak chef for 30 years, as he bought a subscription and a copy of *Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power* from readers going door to door in his neighborhood in Seattle. The book is one of four on special with a subscription (see ad below).

One of the 17 subscriptions sold in

Seattle last week was to a striker on a Teamsters Local 117 picket line. The union struck United Natural Foods Inc. after the company fired 72 union members during a contract dispute, John Naubert reported.

Also from Seattle, Edwin Fruit wrote that *Militant* reader Stalin Harrison turned in two more subscriptions he sold in his barber shop, for a total of four since the beginning of the campaign. He is working on more this week.

The response to the socialist news-weekly and other revolutionary literature is a further registration of what the communist movement has observed in recent years about the level of political thinking and discussions going on in the working class, generated by the cumulative effects of the deepest economic crisis of capitalism in living memory.

Persistently high unemployment exerts a pressure on millions of workers, fostering competition among us and making it easier for bosses to go after our wages, working conditions, unions and dignity. When we fight back, we confront the weak state of organized labor today as a result of decades of seeking “common ground” with the bosses and support for their political parties by bureaucratic misleaderships—a problem that will be solved in the course of class battles to come.

But despite these challenges and limitations of resistance today, more and more working people are interested in reading a paper that tells the truth about and explains the root causes of the crisis; addresses a wide range of political questions from a working-class perspective to arm and unify our class; covers strikes and social struggles of workers around the world; and charts a fighting course to confront the mounting assaults by the bosses and their government that seek to foist the burden of the crisis on our backs.

While all focus and attention this

Students in Hungary protest tuition raises



Reuters/Bernadett Szabo

Thousands of students demonstrated Dec. 12 in Budapest, Hungary, against the government’s incremental expansion of university tuition, a novelty in the country where capitalism was overturned some six decades ago.

For decades university education has been free of charge. As of the next academic year, government-paid tuition will be restricted to 10,500 undergraduate students, compared to 56,000 in 2010 and 34,000 this year. Those accepted now have to sign a contract pledging to work in Hungary for a number of years or pay back the tuition.

As a consequence of the Soviet victory over German imperialism in World War II, capitalist governments in Eastern Europe were replaced by governments under control of Communist parties beholden to Moscow, which sought “peaceful coexistence” with world imperialism as part of securing privileges for a bureaucratic ruling caste. In response to Washington’s refusal to reach an entente with Moscow, these repressive governments nationalized industry and land and other measures that broke the back of capitalist rule.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the ruling castes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe began, bit by bit and with great difficulty, to re-impose capitalist social relations, drawing working people back into politics as they resist the consequences.

—EMMA JOHNSON

week are on making the international quota, the effort to expand the readership of the socialist newsweekly will continue long after the end of the drive.

The final scoreboard will be printed

in the next issue, two weeks from this one.

If you want to join, you can order a bundle or subscription blanks at themilitant@mac.com or (212) 244-4899.

Fund contributors: ‘SWP brings int’l working-class perspective’

BY SUSAN LAMONT

Heading into the eighth week of the \$100,000 Socialist Workers Party fund, supporters in four areas are ahead of schedule and in two others close behind, reflecting stepped-up attention to making every local quota in the national fund. So far, \$68,584 has come in.

The number of first-time contributors is growing, both in numbers and in the amount contributed. Fund supporters in New York City have won 43 first-time contributors to the fund, totaling \$835. Two of them gave \$100 each.

Des Moines fund director Chuck Guerra reports that they have received donations from 16 new contributors, for a total of \$70.

Robert Beal and Iselda Acosta, new distributors of the *Militant* in Yakima, Wash., have sold 16 subscriptions during the *Militant*’s fall campaign. They are also first-time contributors to the Party-Building Fund. “We wanted to do our small part to help the Socialist Workers Party continue providing the international working-class perspective,” they wrote in a note to Seattle fund director Clay Dennison.

As a revolutionary workers party, the Socialist Workers Party depends on contributions from workers, young people, and other supporters to finance its work. The annual fall Party-Building Fund is an important part of those contributions. If you haven’t yet made a donation, con-

sider sending one in today.

The nine-week fund ends Dec. 24. Final payments received by Dec. 31 will be counted on the final scoreboard.

Contributions can be sent to the SWP address nearest you (see page 8) or directly to the SWP National Office at 306 W. 37th St., 10th floor, NY, NY 10018.

Party-Building Fund Week 7 of 9

Area	Quota	Collected	%
Lincoln	\$250	\$250	100%
Seattle	\$8,500	\$7,240	85%
Los Angeles	\$8,500	\$7,236	85%
Des Moines*	\$2,700	\$2,122	79%
Atlanta	\$8,600	\$6,531	76%
San Francisco	\$13,500	\$10,016	74%
Boston	\$4,000	\$2,855	71%
New York	\$20,000	\$13,318	67%
Omaha	\$600	\$399	67%
Twin Cities	\$6,000	\$3,984	66%
Miami	\$3,000	\$1,884	63%
Philadelphia	\$4,200	\$2,380	57%
Washington	\$7,500	\$3,710	49%
Chicago	\$9,500	\$3,919	41%
Houston	\$3,500	\$1,190	34%
Other		\$1,550	
Total	\$100,350	\$68,584	69%
Should Be	\$100,000	\$77,778	78%
* Raised goal			

Special offers

The Working Class and the Transformation of Learning

by Jack Barnes

\$2 with a subscription to the *Militant* (usually \$3)

Women in Cuba: The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution

by Vilma Espín, Asela de los Santos, Yolanda Ferrer

\$10 with subscription (usually \$20)

Malcolm X, Black Liberation, and the Road to Workers Power

by Jack Barnes

\$10 with subscription (usually \$20)

The Cuban Five: Who They Are, Why They Were Framed, Why They Should Be Free

Articles, interviews from the *Militant*

\$3 with subscription (usually \$5)

See distributors on page 8

‘Workers need to fight for gov’t-funded jobs program’

Socialist Workers candidates in LA campaign door to door

BY ARLENE RUBINSTEIN

LOS ANGELES—Norton Sandler and Eleanor García, Socialist Workers Party candidates for mayor and District 2 school board, joined supporters campaigning door to door in the Inglewood neighborhood here Dec. 15. They sold 11 subscriptions to the *Militant*, the campaign newspaper.

High school student David Bañuelos renewed his subscription when campaigners came to his house. “I’ve been working with my father landscaping since I was five years old,” Bañuelos said. “Now we have to work more. We never used to work on Sunday.”

“Many workers agree that the ruling class and their two parties have no solution for their crisis,” García said. “Workers need to come together and fight for a massive government-funded program to provide jobs for those without, to build things workers need,

from hospitals to schools to infrastructure.”

“We need that,” Bañuelos said. “My mother works for the government. She’s responsible for more children today and makes less money.”

“A jobs program to put millions to work at union scale is something the working class will have to fight for,” García said. “All of our gains have been wrested through mass struggle.”

Sandler talked with Jessica Diaz on her way home from shopping with her young son. She works part time as an aide in a nursing home after being laid off from a job with the Los Angeles County library system following city government budget cuts.

Diaz said she is supposed to get four days of work followed by two days off, but her employer often changes or cancels a workday with little notice. “It’s like being fishing bait,” she said. “If



Militant/Arlene Rubinstein

Eleanor García, SWP candidate for Los Angeles Unified School Board District 2, speaks with high school student David Bañuelos outside his home as he renews his *Militant* subscription.

they don’t need you, they just throw us back in the water.”

Sandler pointed to the *Militant*’s explanation of why millions are being forced into part-time jobs as the bosses squeeze more work from fewer workers, and the real scope of unem-

ployment, which is masked by official jobless figures. Diaz signed up for an introductory subscription.

Campaigners also found interest in discussing the deepening crisis in workers’ health care. On Dec. 13 a federal appeals court here ruled that the California government can cut Medi-Cal, the state program that distributes Medicaid benefits.

Initial proposals for the cuts include limiting to seven the number of annual doctor visits. Payments to doctors and pharmacies that provide medical care and prescription drugs will be slashed by 10 percent. Many doctors say they will refuse to see Medi-Cal patients at the reduced rate.

“I told those I met door to door that these attacks being pushed by the governor and the legislature in Sacramento highlight the necessity of working people mobilizing independently of the two capitalist parties,” Sandler said.

“This is a compelling example why workers must chart a revolutionary course to take power out of the hands of the capitalists, opening the door to organizing a socialized medical system that provides universal cradle-to-grave health care for all.”

Barbara Bowman contributed to this article.

Volunteers get Pathfinder books in stores, libraries

BY MARY ELLEN MARUS

VANCOUVER, British Columbia—Supporters of the communist movement in the U.S. and Canada are on a campaign to get books on revolutionary working-class politics into more libraries and bookstores where they can find their way into the hands of workers and youth.

The goal of the effort, which began in September and runs through the end of January, is to win 120 orders. As of Dec. 15, orders stand at 83—33 of which were from bookstores and libraries ordering Pathfinder books for the first time.

“A Puerto Rican-oriented bookstore here in Philadelphia ordered 20 books,” said Mitchel Rosenberg. This included five copies in English and Spanish each of *The Cuban Five: Who They Are, Why They Were Framed, Why They Should Be Free* and *Puerto Rico: Independence Is a Necessity* by Rafael Cancel Miranda. (See page 7 for information on the Cuban Five.)

Nick Castle in Los Angeles received three orders for the book on the Cuban Five. This title is already on the shelves of a college library in Florida along with all 23 titles in the series “The Cuban Revolution in World Politics.”

Pathfinder volunteers received their 20th order from a Black-focused store in Long Beach, Calif., which included six copies of *Capitalism and the Transformation of Africa*.

“I find your publications interesting. I’m reading *To See the Dawn* and enjoying it so much,” wrote a professor from the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the University of Arizona to one of Pathfinder’s sales volunteers. The book contains documents of the First Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in 1920 in Baku, Azerbaijan, organized by the leadership of the Communist International following the Russian Revolution.

Sales volunteers participating in the *Salon du livre* in Montreal, the world’s second-largest francophone book fair, got new leads to follow up on. “Two enthusiastic high school women bought books and gave us the name of their

school librarian and thought it would be ‘cool’ if they could find these books in their library,” reported salesperson Brigitte Grouix.

A special effort was made to publicize Pathfinder’s *October 1962: The ‘Missile’ Crisis as Seen from Cuba* to take advantage of the 50th anniversary of this important historical event. In Los Angeles several mailings resulted in eight orders for this title.

Meanwhile, Pathfinder books bought online through Amazon.com continue to outpace previous years’ sales. Bestsellers include *The Communist Manifesto* and titles by Malcolm X, Leon Trotsky and Thomas Sankara. Pathfinder titles will soon be available through Amazon Canada, making revolutionary literature, particularly Pathfinder’s French titles, readily available to youth and working people in that country.

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



January 1, 1988

TORONTO—McDonnell Douglas Canada has been forced to make concessions to union demands for improvements in health and safety at its plant here, after workers brought production to a standstill by exercising their right to refuse to work under unsafe conditions.

The job action followed a Nov. 13 report by the Ontario Ministry of Labour. The report confirmed what McDonnell Douglas workers have known for years: “Safety and healthy work practices appear to take second place to production requirements.”

CAW Local 1967, which organizes the 3,500 aerospace workers at the plant, responded to the report by distributing a leaflet at the plant gate summarizing its facts and conclusions. That day hundreds of workers refused to work and the next day production had effectively been halted.



December 31, 1962

The return to Miami of the Cuban prisoners from the Bay of Pigs invasion should put an end to U.S. press stories about their “mistreatment” in Cuba and “Buchenwald-like” prison camps. From television and newspaper photos they appear in good physical condition.

Under persistent coaxing and inducement by the U.S. press some are beginning to utter half-hearted vows about “returning” to Cuba in another invasion.

Are such boasts mere expediency to please the U.S. authorities? Or are the released prisoners suckers enough to be used by U.S. imperialism in another military assault on their homeland? For their own sakes, it is to be hoped they have learned their bitter lesson. The U.S. army has been engaged in a special effort to recruit Cuban counter-revolutionaries and some 1,200 of them are getting training in special Spanish-speaking units in army camps in the Carolinas.

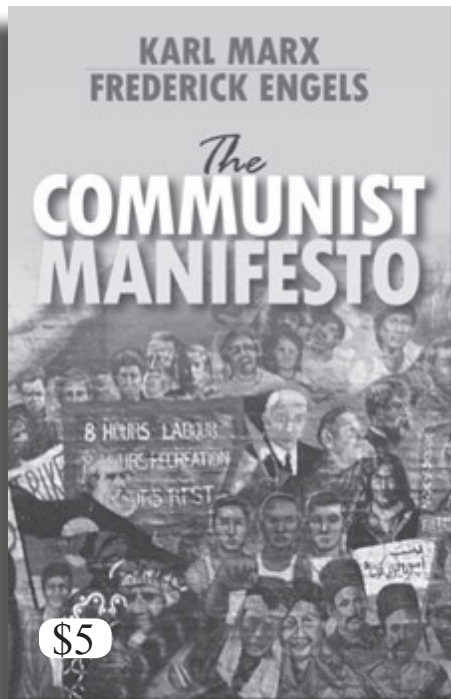


January 1, 1938

Paris transport facilities and public services were paralyzed by a general strike beginning at dawn on Dec. 29. This was the answer to the attempts of Camille Chautemps’ People’s Front Government to break the new wave of sit-in strikes sweeping over France.

Faced with rising prices, which have wiped out the gains made by the great strikes of June 1936, and new decree laws virtually abolishing the 40-hour week won at that time, the French workers are rising to the struggle.

The strikes reveal a determined mass upsurge on the part of the workers. The occupation of the factories is widespread. Although centered in Paris with the Goodrich tire plant as a focal point, it has rapidly spread to include telephone workers, steel workers, chemical workers, department stores, food warehouses, river boatmen and all forms of transportation, especially the truck drivers.



pathfinderpress.com

— ON THE PICKET LINE —

Conn. nursing home workers fight company-imposed takebacks

MILFORD, Conn.—More than 100 health care workers gathered at the West River Health Center here Dec. 13 to celebrate a court order issued two days earlier that HealthBridge Corporation reinstate some 600 workers at the company's five nursing homes in the state by Dec. 17.

A U.S. appeals court that day granted the company's request to delay their return.

The workers—members of District 1199 of the New England Health Care Employees Union, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union—have been on strike for five months.

The unionists chanted, "We won, we are one" and "Don't mess with us." The latter was directed at company security guards standing a few feet away.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled in favor of an unfair labor practice suit brought by the union after the company forced the strike in July by unilaterally imposing cuts in health insurance, pensions and vacation time on its workers.

For the workers at West River the celebration had special significance, since exactly one year ago they had been locked out for four months by HealthBridge. After being back at work for only two months they were again forced out on strike. Workers said that upon returning to work in April they were subjected to harassment by management and expect to receive the same reception when they go back in this time.

"It will be hard, but we will stand together," said Jennifer Musante, a certified nursing assistant.

About 70 workers crossed the picket lines at the struck facilities, according to the *Hartford Courant*.

Kevin Cothran, a member of the Utility Workers Union of America, came with his wife Antoinette to the rally in solidarity. What the company did was so "blatant and egregious" that the court took the unusual step of intervening in the dispute on the side of the union, Cothran said. "The fight for a contract is not over," he observed, "but this court order [against the company] will reinvigorate the struggle."

The company has not responded to a request for comment from the *Militant*.

At a brief rally, David Pickus, president of New England District 1199, lambasted the company for the funds it expends on high-priced lawyers and scabs.

Messages of support from Connecticut's U.S. senators—

Democrats Chris Murphy and Richard Blumenthal—were read.

—Tim Craine

Longshore workers on East and Gulf coasts prepare strike

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla.—"These T-shirts explain everything they want to take away," said International Longshoremen's Association member Bernard Smith as he sold union T-shirts outside the Saturday morning roll call Dec. 15 with three demands: "eight-hour guarantee," "protect container royalty," and "solid safety language."

The ILA and United States Maritime Alliance are negotiating a contract covering 15,000 longshoremen and port workers from Texas to Maine. The contract was due to expire Sept. 30, but was extended 90 days.

The USMA represents maritime terminal operators, port associations and employers of the East and Gulf Coast longshore industry, including 10 of the largest container carriers worldwide.

At a Dec. 10-12 meeting in Delray Beach, an ILA wages committee voted to strike if an agreement is not reached by Dec. 29. It would be the ILA's first coastwide strike in 35 years.

"The current economic reality demands that we improve efficiency and productivity," USMA Chairman and CEO James Capo told Ship & Bunker News Nov. 23, calling the ILA leadership "uncompromising."

"They're trying to take stuff away from us now in anticipation of the widening of the Panama Canal," ILA member Phil Hodor told the *Militant*. He was referring to a third lane being built that will accommodate ships three times larger than those currently passing through the canal.

Ports up and down the Atlantic Seaboard are in a frenzy to get ready for the business, reports the *McClatchy News*.

"A lot of us work year round for that container royalty check," ILA member Richard Wesley told the *Militant* in reference to the "protect container royalty" demand. Container royalties are issued every two years to workers who unload the freight containers based on a percentage of the total tonnage.

The United States Maritime Alliance has proposed capping payments at current levels, which according to SBS Worldwide website, averaged \$15,500 per eligible worker last year.

"The cap wouldn't affect us as much as people in Louisiana and New York/New Jersey because we load cruise ships as well," said Wesley. "But they're brothers and sisters. And if you divide a house, it will fall."

—Tom Baumann



Militant/Tom Baumann

Teamster members and supporters picket building products distributor BlueLinX in Miami Dec. 11. Workers walked off job after bosses kicked union business agent out of plant.

Miami Teamsters strike BlueLinX after union rep thrown out

MIAMI—Workers at BlueLinX, a distributor of construction materials and building products here, walked off the job Nov. 30. The strikers, which include three drivers and six warehouse workers, are members of Teamsters Local 769.

Workers struck after one of their union business agents, Don Marr, was kicked off company property, explained Chuck Taylor at the picket line Dec. 11. Taylor has worked at BlueLinX for 15 years.

"The company and the union were in the middle of contract negotiations," said business agent John Sherman. He explained that the contract stipulates business agents can attend company meetings as part of shop visits, but BlueLinX barred Marr from what it claimed was a safety meeting.

Workers are demanding that their business agent be allowed back and the company continue negotiations.

"No one should have to go out on strike, but you get pushed to the point where you have to put your foot down," said Tom, a Teamster and truck driver who did not want to give his last name, as he walked the picket line in solidarity.

BlueLinX has hired temporary workers and has brought in full-time workers from their nonunion North Carolina facility. The company has not responded to requests for comment from the *Militant*.

A rally for the Teamsters is set to take place Dec. 19 in front of the plant at 3201 NW 110 St.

—Tom Baumann

Bus drivers at Ft. Benning in Ga. fight firings for union organizing

Bus drivers Olivia Currie and Glenda Peoples are fighting to win their jobs back at Taylor Motors, Inc. after being fired, they say, for participating in a union-organizing drive.

Taylor Motors provides bus service to and from school for children at the Ft. Benning military base in Columbus, Ga.

"We were wrongly terminated Aug. 16 for trying to unionize," Currie told the *Militant* while staffing a Jobs With Justice booth at a November protest vigil outside the School of the Americas near Ft. Benning. "We wanted better for our coworkers. The company refused to listen to us, and after the firings gave out an anti-union notice to pressure workers to pull their union cards. The company claims we were fired for 'malicious gossip.'"

The two drivers appealed Georgia's subsequent denial of unemployment compensation, Currie said.

Currie, joined by a couple of Atlanta city bus drivers and several other supporters, got vigil participants to sign petitions backing their demands and distributed copies of a letter on their fight addressed to parents and residents of Ft. Benning.

The letter says that bus drivers work without employer-provided medical insurance, retirement or paid sick days, and drive buses without air-conditioning while heat and exhaust escape from the engines located beside the drivers' seats. It urges parents and residents to contact the company to show support for the demand "Bring Ms. Peoples and Ms. Currie Back To Work!" and to agree to let workers decide whether to unionize.

—Lisa Potash

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

FLORIDA

Miami

The Debate on 'Stand Your Ground': Why Working People Should Oppose Pro-Vigilante Law. Sat., Dec. 29. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. 7100 Biscayne Blvd., Suite 306A. Tel.: (305) 757-8869.

IOWA

Des Moines

Celebrate 54 Years of the Cuban Revolution! Speaker: David Rosenfeld, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 4, 7:30 p.m. 3707 Douglas Ave. Tel.: (515) 707-1779.

MINNESOTA

Minneapolis

Workers, Unions Fight for Space, Rights in North Africa. Speaker: Diana Newberry, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Dec. 28, 7:30 p.m. 416 E. Hennepin Ave., Suite 214. Tel.: (612) 729-1205.

NEW YORK

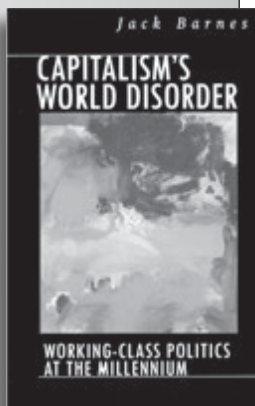
Manhattan

Cuban Workers Mobilize to Rebuild After Sandy Devastation: 'No One Is Left to Fend for Themselves.' Speakers: Martin Koppel, Róger Calero, recently visited Santiago, Cuba, as reporters for the *Militant*. Fri., Jan. 4, 7:30 p.m. 307 W. 36th St., 10th floor. Tel.: (212) 629-6649.

Capitalism's World Disorder Working-Class Politics at the Millennium by Jack Barnes

Social devastation and financial panic, coarsening of politics, cop brutality and imperialist aggression—all are products not of something gone wrong with capitalism but of its lawful workings. Yet the future can be changed by the united struggle of workers and farmers increasingly conscious of their capacity to wage revolutionary struggles for state power and to transform the world. **\$25**

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‘I was 16 when I was tortured, framed up, jailed for 28 years’

Mark Clements tells how Chicago cops ‘stole my life’ and many others

BY MARK A. CLEMENTS

CHICAGO—For more than 21 years former city police commander Jon Burge and detectives who carried out his orders beat and tortured incriminating confessions from criminal suspects—mostly African-American men.

I was 16 years old when I became one of their victims and consequently spent 28 years of my life behind bars for a crime I did not commit. My case is one of many.

I lived on Chicago’s South Side where I worked as a paperboy. On June 17, 1981, four people died in an arson fire at 6602 S. Wentworth Ave., which was in the neighborhood of my route. A young woman who had a dispute with my sister told police a week later that she heard rumors I was responsible for the fire.

I was arrested and taken to Area 3 violent crimes unit headquarters, under Burge’s command, where I was held incommunicado. My parents were not informed and I was denied a phone call.

I was placed inside a small interrogation room with a detective I earlier saw drinking alcohol. I was beaten, tortured in my genitals and called “n----- boy” and “little n----- motherf-----.”

After being tortured twice in this fashion by Detective John McCann, he and Detective Daniel McWeeny fed me details about the crime and instructed me to repeat it to Cook County State’s Attorney Kevin Moore, after which I would be allowed to make a telephone call and go home. I felt that if I cooperated with the detectives I would have

the opportunity to establish my innocence later.

Because I was poor, I couldn’t afford a good attorney. I was legally represented by two assistant Cook County public defenders with little experience who never investigated the case. Not one witness testified against me and no physical evidence was presented. Nevertheless, I was tried and convicted on hearsay evidence and a “confession” beaten out of me.

The confession stated that I and three others went to collect drug money from a man in the building on behalf of a drug dealer who ordered us to set the building on fire. It also said we beat and stabbed the man. But a medical examiner testified that he found no evidence of a stabbing or a beating.

Found guilty of arson and four counts of murder, I was sentenced to four natural life sentences without parole and told I would die in prison. The trial made front page news in the local papers and I was made to look like a monster by prosecutors and the judge.

During sentencing I told Judge William Cousins Jr. that I was innocent and the trial was a cover-up by him and others to protect the cops. I can still recall speaking: “Judge I tell you this ... I did not kill those people! I have watched the police steal my youth and now the court has stole my life.”

I believe if I was permitted a parole hearing, the evidence would have been so compelling I would have been released.

After 26 years in prison, Bernardine Dohrn, an associate law professor at



Courtesy of Mark Clements

Mark Clements, right, at protest outside police station in Chicago in 2011 against rape by cops.

Northwestern University, visited me at the Pontiac Correctional Center, where she was conducting interviews relevant to youth sentenced to life without parole. She convinced the Northwestern School of Law to take a look at my case and seek counsel to represent me. I was assigned four attorneys from a very large Chicago law firm, who quickly began taking apart my frame-up.

The “confession,” coerced through torture, was inconsistent with physical evidence.

Bottles recovered at the burned apartment—which I was instructed to say in my “confession” had been in my possession—were determined to have only fingerprints belonging to police officers who worked the scene.

A box cutter I used to cut straps off of newspapers was the alleged stabbing weapon. DNA testing revealed it had no blood whatsoever on it.

On August 18, 2009, I was freed by

a Cook County Circuit Court judge after serving 28 years and 55 days behind prison walls. My daughter Tameka Lee was 28 years old at the time.

Since 2009 I have worked as the administrator for the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, a national organization and one of many that have been rallying around demands that victims of police torture get a hearing.

Because it is an issue my mother Virginia Clements rallied around before she died in May 2011, I became obligated to fight to ensure that 1) Jon Burge would go to prison; 2) the death penalty would be abolished in Illinois; 3) that all police torture victims would receive a hearing on their claims; 4) that all juveniles sentenced to natural life across the country would be allowed parole hearings.

In 1990, an investigative agency within the Chicago Police Department’s Office of Professional Standards determined that Burge did beat and torture criminal suspects. Burge was fired as a result of that report.

In 2002, a Cook County judge appointed a special prosecutor to investigate tortures under Burge. In 2006 it determined that tortures were epidemic and systematic at the Area 2 and Area 3 violent crimes units in Chicago. By that time, Burge could not be indicted for the tortures, because the statute of limitations had expired.

In 2008, Burge was finally indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice for lying about the tortures. He was found guilty and sentenced to four and a half years in federal prison.

Burge still collects his pension. Detectives who were part of the torture, including McWeeny, James O’Brien, Michael Kill, McCann, Kenneth Boudreau and many others were never indicted. O’Brien is on active duty today.

How many torture claims are needed before a serious look is given to the officers’ conduct? It hurts my heart each time to see the mothers of these men at protests, fighting for an opportunity to have their sons back home.

One of these prisoners, Grayland Johnson, recently died at the Stateville Correctional Center awaiting a hearing on his claim of torture.

Mark A. Clements is administrator over the Campaign to End the Death Penalty.

Tribute to Malik Williams in NJ: killer cops ‘need to be in jail’

BY DAN FEIN

GARFIELD, N.J.—Some 100 people attended a Memorial Tribute For Malik Williams, held here Dec. 10, the one-year anniversary of his killing by police. Williams was a 19-year-old Black man who police chased into a garage and then shot numerous times. He was unarmed.

The event was sponsored by U.R.G.E.N.T. (United Residents of Garfield Engaging Neighborhood Transformation), which was formed after the killing. The group has organized protests to demand prosecution of the cops involved.

Speakers included mothers and other relatives of those killed by cops in New York and New Jersey.

Radio DJ Ron Kelly chaired the meeting. “Don’t let up on the fight for justice,” he said. “All the cops have to say after murdering one of us is ‘I thought my life was in danger.’ Running from the police should not be a death sentence. The police act as judge, jury and executioner.”

Margarita Rosario spoke about the cop killing and cover-up of her son, Anthony Rosario, and his cousin, Hilton Vega, two young Puerto Ricans shot a total of 28 times by New York City cops on Jan. 12, 1995. “My son Anthony was executed like an animal,” Rosario told participants. “He was shot 14 times face

down on the floor. The city officials at the time said there was an investigation going on, but it was an investigation to protect the police. Mayor Giuliani said the cops’ actions were a ‘job well done.’”

In response to previous speakers who thanked some elected city officials for attending the meeting, Rosario said we should thank them only after they publicly denounce the cops’ killing of Williams and join the marches.

“These cops need to be in jail serving time,” Rosario added, before leading chants of “No justice, no peace.”

Phillip Pannell, a Black teenager, was killed by cops in Teaneck, on April 10, 1990. His sister, Natasha Pannell, spoke and said her brother had his hands up when cops shot him in the back. “I believe in marching and rallying,” she said.

Also speaking was Constance Malcolm, the mother of Ramarley Graham, an 18-year-old African-American killed by cops in the bathroom of his house on Feb. 2, 2012, in the Bronx. After failing to get into the house through the front door, the cops went into the building through the back, then kicked in the door to the apartment.

“Richard Haste, the cop who killed my son, is charged with manslaughter and is going to court tomorrow,” Malcolm said. “He and other killer cops

need to be in jail.”

Kenneth Chamberlain Jr. sent a brief message to the meeting about his father, Kenneth Chamberlain, a 68-year-old African-American killed by the cops in White Plains, N.Y., in November 2011. The police responded to a false alarm from Chamberlain’s medical alert pendant. After he refused to open his door to the cops, they broke in, shocked him with a Taser and then shot him dead.

“The police do not serve and protect. There is no punishment for killer cops—no accountability,” said Danette Chavis, whose son Gregory was killed by the NYPD in 2004.

Yusef Salaam served seven years in prison after being falsely convicted along with four others in the case known as the Central Park Five. In 1989 they were charged with violently assaulting and raping a female jogger in Central Park. Salaam was 15 years old at the time. He praised the new Ken Burns documentary on the case, *The Central Park Five*, urging those in the audience to see it.

Salaam said New York City has served a subpoena on Burns for his sources for the film. Burns has refused to comply.

“We have a criminal system of injustice,” said Salaam, who ended his talk with poems he wrote in prison.

Int'l meeting to free Cuban 5 held in Holguín, Cuba

BY MARTÍN KOPPEL
AND RÓGER CALERO

HOLGUÍN, Cuba—A call to build a world conference in solidarity with Cuba, to take place in Havana Nov. 24–28, 2014, culminated a four-day international gathering here on the fight to free five Cuban revolutionaries imprisoned in the United States since 1998 on trumped-up charges. The call was announced by Kenia Serrano, president of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), which sponsored the Nov. 28–Dec. 1 event in Holguín.

The Eighth International Colloquium for the Freedom of the Cuban Five and against Terrorism, an event held annually in Holguín since 2005, was the largest to date. According to the organizers, it drew more than 300 people from some 40 countries around the world, ranging from Puerto Rico to Vietnam, Spain, Italy, Russia, United Kingdom, Lebanon, Peru, Argentina, El Salvador, Venezuela, Ecuador, and the United States. One of the largest delegations came from Canada, including five workers belonging to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

Five relatives of the Cuban revolutionaries, active in the international

campaign for their release, took part in the four-day event and addressed the delegates.

The Holguín conference built on two successful ICAP-initiated regional gatherings in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution held earlier this year—one in September in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for countries of Africa and another in October in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the Asia-Pacific region. Delegates exchanged experiences on activities they have organized over the past year and discussed plans for the coming months in the fight to free Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González.

Delegates traveled to half a dozen areas in rural Holguín province on one day of the conference and joined Cubans in voluntary labor brigades rebuilding housing and planting crops in areas hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy.

One of the featured speakers at the Holguín event was Dolores Huerta, a founding leader of the United Farm Workers union, which led big farm-worker struggles in California in the 1960s and early '70s. Huerta has spoken at a number of events in the United



Militant/Martín Koppel

Dolores Huerta, a founding leader of United Farm Workers union in California, addresses international conference for release of Cuban Five in Holguín, Cuba, Nov. 28. To her left are Amaury Torno, conference organizer and head of Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples in Holguín; and Adriana Pérez, whose husband Gerardo Hernández is serving double life sentence in United States on trumped-up “conspiracy” charges.

States calling on the U.S. government to release the Cuban Five.

Alicia Jrapko, of the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five, announced that a series of national actions in Washington, D.C.,

called Five Days for the Cuban Five, have been scheduled for May 31–June 5, 2013.

Mary-Alice Waters contributed to this article.

Get torture cops ‘off the streets’

Continued from front page

Mary Williams, whose sons Nicholas Escamilla and William Ephraim are among 36 who accuse O’Brien of torture in a report compiled by the Illinois Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission.

The ITIRC was established by the state legislature in 2009 to investigate cop torture claims. On June 5 of this year, shortly after the legislature voted to strip all its funding, the commission submitted its first recommendations. It then shut down June 30.

According to ITIRC Executive Director David Thomas, the commission has received a grant of \$160,000, which should be enough for it to continue work for another year.

Several participants addressed the news media before going into the Police Board meeting.

“We’re here to demand the Chicago Police Board take O’Brien off the streets immediately, investigate him like Jon Burge was investigated, and then take appropriate action against him,” said Mark Clements, a leader of the Campaign Against Torture and an organizer of the action. “And we’re asking the U.S. Attorney’s Office to investigate O’Brien and the other detectives who worked under Burge.”

Board President Demetrius Carney—flanked by eight fellow Police Board members and Independent Police Review Authority Chief Administrator Ilana Rosenzweig—convened the meeting, insisting those registered to speak

keep their remarks to two minutes.

Clements and fellow activist Wallace “Gator” Bradley presented the board with copies of the ITIRC report on the case of George Ellis Anderson, who was arrested in 1991 and pressed into signing a murder confession under torture by O’Brien and another cop. Anderson was sentenced to life in prison.

“Detectives working under Burge tortured my son,” Plummer told the board. “They forced him to confess to a crime he did not commit. He was sentenced to natural life in prison and has been there for 21 years. And as tired as I am, as long as I can draw breath I’m going to keep fighting until he’s out.”

“I’m the mother of Marcus Wiggins,” said Carolyn Johnson. “He was just 13 years old when O’Brien beat him with a flashlight and shocked him with electricity. All the time they wouldn’t let me see him. This board has to get O’Brien off the streets.”

Valerie Love, the aunt of Javan Deloney, addressed the board on behalf of her nephew to demand that O’Brien be taken off the streets and investigated.

Also attending the meeting to demand information on the status of ongoing investigations into police misconduct were 20 friends and family of Reikia Boyd and Dakota Bright, gunned down by Chicago cops in recent months. Among them were Boyd’s brother, Martinez Sutton, and Bright’s uncle, John Edwards.

None of the Police Board members offered any concrete information.



CubaDebate

Conference delegates join Cuban volunteers Nov. 30 in work brigade rebuilding housing in Mayarí, a municipality in Holguín province and one of areas hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy.

Who are the Cuban Five

Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González and René González are Cuban revolutionaries who during the 1990s accepted assignments from the Cuban government to gather information on the activities of Cuban-American counterrevolutionary groups operating in southern Florida. These paramilitary outfits, organizing on U.S. soil with virtual impunity, have a long record of carrying out bombings, assassinations and other deadly attacks, both against targets in Cuba and supporters of the Cuban Revolution in the United States, Puerto Rico and elsewhere.

On Sept. 12, 1998, the five were arrested by the FBI. They were framed up and convicted on a variety of charges, which included acting as unregistered agents of the Cuban government and possession of false identity documents. Without a shred of evidence, three were charged with “conspiracy to gather and transmit national defense information.”

Hernández was also convicted of conspiracy to commit murder based on the pretext that he bore responsibility for the Cuban government’s 1996 shoot-down of two aircraft flown by the counterrevolutionary group Brothers to the Rescue that had invaded Cuban airspace in disregard of Havana’s repeated warnings. He is serving two life terms plus 15 years.

All but René González remain in prison. Since October 2011 he has been serving a three-year “supervised release.” On the pretext of his dual citizenship, his request to return to Cuba has been denied. His wife, Olga Salanueva, is barred from entering the United States, as is Adriana Pérez, the wife of Hernández.



The Cuban Five: Who They Are, Why They Were Framed, Why They Should Be Free



Women in Cuba: The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution
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‘Class battles ahead are inevitable, outcome is not’

Below is an excerpt from Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible? by Mary-Alice Waters, a member of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee and president of Pathfinder Press. The title is one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for December.

At the Venezuela Book Fair in 2007 and 2008 a wide-ranging debate on this topic took place. Talks by Waters at both occasions are presented in this booklet. The excerpt is from Nov. 14, 2008, when she spoke as part of a panel launching a Spanish-language edition of the book. Copyright © 2008 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

BY MARY-ALICE WATERS

As we said last year, however, the question of whether socialist revolution is possible in the United States is no small matter. Its “answer, in practice, will ultimately determine the future of humanity—or more accurately, perhaps, whether there is a future for humanity.”

What most struck me in rereading last year's presentation was the list of assumptions one would have to make to reach the conclusion that socialist revolution in the U.S. is not possible. ...

“To reach that conclusion,” we said, “you would have to believe that there won't again be economic, financial, or



Lucas Jackson/Reuters

March 2006 rally in Los Angeles opposing bill that would have made it a felony to be undocumented. “We saw this vanguard-in-becoming as millions of workers took to the streets of cities and towns in 2006 and 2007,” said Waters, “to demand legalization of 12 million immigrants.”

social crises on the order of those that marked the first half of the twentieth century. That the ruling families of the imperialist world and their economic wizards have found a way to ‘manage’ capitalism so as to preclude shattering financial crises that could lead to something akin to the Great Depression. ...

“You would have to be convinced that competition among the imperialist rivals, as well as between them and the more economically advanced semicolonial powers, is diminishing and that their profit rates ... are now going to begin to rise for several decades on an accelerated curve.” ...

What seemingly started as a capitalist crisis centered in credit and banking has now been revealed to be something of a very different dimension. As the de facto bankruptcy of General Motors bears witness, the deepest contraction of industrial production and employment since the opening decades of the last century is accelerating dramatically. ...

It is worth reminding ourselves that the Great Depression of the 1930s was not the consequence of the stock market crash of 1929 and subsequent banking crises alone. Its roots are found in the violently intensifying competition among capitalist powers in the years leading up to World War I—for colonial possessions, access to markets and raw materi-

als, and inexpensive sources of labor to exploit—and the economic and social breakdowns and financial catastrophe that accompanied that interimperialist slaughter and its aftermath. And it took the global carnage of the Second World War, including its massive physical destruction of capital across Europe and Asia from 1939 to 1945, to lay the basis for the exploiting classes to pull out of that crisis.

That is important. As Lenin stressed, there is no hopeless situation for capitalism. The two decades from 1930 to 1950 showed once again that the finance capitalists, if they are not stopped beforehand, can dig themselves out of any crisis—by inflicting enough bloody defeats on the working classes and destroying enough of the world's existing industrial capacity.

The only question is the price the toilers will be made to pay.

The only solution is taking the power to inflict these horrors—state power—out of their hands, once and for all.

Is that possible? That is, after all, the question we posed a year ago. And we made the point that revolutionary struggles by the toilers are not only inevitable, they will be initiated at first not by us, “but forced upon us by the crisis-driven assaults of the propertied classes.”

The working class in massive num-

bers never enters on the road of revolutionary struggle lightly, or all at once. Workers sense the stakes, the sacrifices it will entail, the uncertainty. Our class in its majority exhausts other alternatives first, including alternatives to communist political leadership. ...

Even before the new stage of the global retrenchment that is now accelerating, however, we have already seen, already been part of, the opening skirmishes of a fighting vanguard of the working class emerging in the United States. We saw this vanguard-in-becoming as millions of workers took to the streets of cities and towns across the country in 2006 and 2007 to demand the legalization of some 12 million immigrants whose documents the U.S. government does not recognize. They retook May Day as a fighting holiday of the working class. ...

This is a working-class vanguard strengthened by its increasingly international character, by the traditions of struggle being added by workers from around the world to the longtime traditions of working-class battles in the United States itself. This is a working class that is slowly but surely learning in struggle the life-or-death necessity of fighting shoulder to shoulder—as well as how to do so. ...

I want to close by emphasizing one point.

Our job today is above all a political one. While the class battles ahead of us are inevitable, their outcome is not. That depends on us. On our capacity to unflinchingly face the truth and speak with clarity to fellow combatants, to learn to rely on our own increasing class solidarity and unity in struggle. ...

Working people the world over are in for decades of intertwined economic, military, social, and political crises, and accompanying explosive class battles. The period we are entering will be more akin to the years from the opening of the twentieth century through World War II than to anything any of us have lived through. The one thing we can be sure of is that our side, our class, will have more than one opportunity to alter the course of history in the only way we can—the way the workers and farmers of Cuba did it fifty years ago, and the way the working people of the tsarist empire did it four decades before them.

December

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

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8

The Militant December 31, 2012

Greetings to workers behind bars

The *Militant* sends New Year’s greetings to the 2.4 million fellow workers behind bars in U.S. prisons, jails, juvenile facilities, immigration detention centers and military lockup.

The scope of incarceration in the U.S. is unprecedented in history and unparalleled in the world. Some 7 million people are currently entangled in the “justice” system, either incarcerated, on probation or parole. Driven in large part by threats and plea bargains depriving millions of due process or presumption of innocence, the vast majority are working people, and in great disproportion African-American men.

The cumulative impact of capitalist justice on the lives of working people is engendering fights—inside and outside prison walls—against the government’s frame-up system, cop brutality and brutal treatment of prisoners.

And where workers fight back against boss attacks today, they more and more find themselves confronting enemies in the cops and the courts, who invariably side with the owners of capital.

As these struggles win sympathy from broader layers of working people, they help to instill a healthy dis-

trust and hatred of cops and other agents of capitalist repression.

We send our salute to Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, René González and Fernando González, five exemplary working-class revolutionaries framed up and imprisoned by the U.S. government for their defense of the Cuban Revolution.

We extend solidarity to all political prisoners, including Puerto Rican independence militant Oscar López Rivera, held 31 years, 12 of them in solitary; Native American activist Leonard Peltier; Mumia Abu-Jamal; and Lynne Stewart, framed up for offering legal services to many facing government attack.

Over the past year, the number of subscribers to the *Militant* behind bars in the U.S. has doubled to some 65. The paper gets passed around and is used in discussion groups and classes. We’d like to see the subscription base in prisons doubled again a year from now.

The *Militant* is proud to offer complimentary or reduced-rate subscriptions to prisoners. Contribute to the Militant Prisoners’ Fund to help us continue this working-class tradition. (*Militant* address on page 2.)

‘Right-to-work’ laws can’t stop class struggle

Continued from front page

Many conservative political writers gloated over the results. “The most famously unionized state, birthplace of the United Auto Workers, royalty of the American working class, became right-to-work,” *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote Dec. 13. “The heyday of the sovereign private-sector union is gone.”

Advocates of the law claim the issue is the “right” of workers to refuse to pay union dues. But many commentaries supporting the law after the vote focused on how it will weaken unions, drive down wages and make Michigan “more attractive” to investment.

The bill’s “public policy” statement says “strikes and lockouts and other forms of industrial strife, regardless of where the merits of the controversy lie, are forces productive ultimately of economic waste.” It argues for “mediation of such disputes under the guidance and supervision of a governmental agency.”

“Let’s be honest,” Krauthammer says. “Right-to-work laws do weaken unions. And de-unionization can lead to lower wages.”

Right-to-work laws arose as part of the anti-labor, anti-communist offensive in the years after World War II. The Taft-Hartley Act, adopted in 1947, opened the door to state governments outlawing “closed shop” unions. Initially such laws were passed in the South, where the refusal of labor officials to take on Jim Crow segregation had cut across the working-class unity needed to organize unions.

Since the onset of the worldwide crisis of capitalism, more and more politicians have advanced “right-to-work” as part of broader attacks on the working class.

The Michigan law was held up as an example by Morgan Stanley bank analyst Adam Jonas in a phone hook-up with investors, Reuters reported Dec. 11. Capitalists that invested in the auto industry were worried the United Auto Workers would try to recover concessions agreed to in 2007 when the contract expires in 2015, and that “all the good work since the crisis would be chipped away over time,” Jonas said. “Moving to right-to-vote in Michigan would go some distance towards calming those fears.”

After his election in 2010, Governor Snyder and other right-to-work advocates were hesitant to push the issue, fearing working-class opposition. According to Reuters, there was agreement from bosses and union officials not to “rock the boat.”

But last year officials in the Service Employees International Union and UAW decided to push for a referendum seeking to bar right-to-vote laws in the state constitution. The ballot measure was defeated.

This emboldened union opponents to push for rapid adoption of a right-to-work law and convinced Snyder to sign it.

The Socialist Workers Party called on workers to vote for the pro-union amendment to the state constitution last fall. “Not because restrictive laws are the reason our unions are getting weaker, a rationalization often heard from union officials,” James Harris, SWP presidential candidate at the time said, but as part of “laying the groundwork to transform our unions into effective working-class combat organizations against the bosses’ deepening attacks.”

Union officials did not advance the ballot measure as part of mobilizing workers to take on boss attacks, organize the unorganized and champion social struggles in the interests of the working class.

To the contrary, the officials’ campaign was part and parcel of a strategy of relying on “friends” in the Democratic Party to support laws that help maximize dues collection in the absence of a class struggle perspective that could inspire more workers to organize and join unions. The ballot measure was put forward by the same labor officialdom that has for decades sought common ground with bosses to avoid and limit strikes and other union battles, while supporting some of the same capitalist politicians who are helping lead the assault.

The response of the leaders of the UAW in the face of the auto bosses’ attacks on workers over the past decade is a case in point. In 2007, UAW officials pushed through a two-tier wage plan, undercutting the unity of autoworkers. In 2011, they agreed to “flexible work rules” and elimination of the jobs bank program that had provided laid-off workers with continued wages and benefits. At every step, they accommodated the bosses’ need for profitability in an unholy alliance to save “American jobs.”

At the same time, bluster, bombast and thuggish behavior are more and more employed as a substitute for effectively organized resistance. This was the case when pro-union protestors in Michigan tore down a large tent put up by the anti-labor group Americans for Prosperity during the Dec. 11 protest. This action only damaged the ability of unions to garner needed support among working people—organized and unorganized—for a fight that is objectively in their interests.

Far from unions being “outdated,” the fight to wield their power is needed more than ever.

And no anti-labor law can prevent the use of union power when workers decide to fight or the inevitable class battles ahead that will lay the basis to strengthen and transform our unions into instruments of class struggle—and schools for revolution.

Egypt constitution

Continued from front page

Heterogeneous forces opposing the referendum include bourgeois, social democratic and other middle-class opposition parties; many trade unions; and Coptic Christian groups.

Television advertisements backing the constitution claim that it would guarantee workers a minimum wage, set a maximum wage that would lessen the gap between rich and poor, and guarantee union rights.

The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions answered the claims in a video produced by the Moriseen Center in Cairo, noting that the constitution does not say how much the minimum wage would be and would tie it to production, not inflation. The “maximum wage” section includes other clauses that render it meaningless. The constitution also stipulates that only one union is allowed per “profession,” in effect denying recognition to many unions formed in the fight against the Mubarak dictatorship that challenge the government-funded Egyptian Trade Union Federation.

Morsi insisted on scheduling the vote to begin just two weeks after a Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Constituent Assembly approved the draft, leaving little time for discussion or debate. On Nov. 22 the president issued a decree saying that until a new constitution was approved and government elected his decisions were law and could not be appealed.

Both supporters and opponents of the authoritarian moves organized demonstrations across the country, at times battling each other. Both sides have organized actions as large as 100,000 or more. By Dec. 14 at least 10 people had been killed and 700 wounded, according to the Associated Press.

The Army’s Supreme Military Council, which ruled the country for 18 months after removing dictator Hosni Mubarak from office in February 2011, following several weeks of mass demonstrations, has tried to portray itself as standing above the fray.

The opposition consists of “counterrevolutionary forces aimed at destroying the gains of the revolution,” Morsi claimed Dec. 1.

After most of the country’s judges refused to supervise the referendum, Morsi announced it would take place in two stages: in half the electoral districts Dec. 15 and in the remainder Dec. 22. Most of the judges are Mubarak appointees.

Unions face a ‘war on workers’

“We call for the workers to vote ‘no,’” Fatma Ramadan, a leader of the independent union federation told the *Militant*. “The rights of the workers are being stolen from them following the same policies of Mubarak.

“We are facing a war against the workers from a government that is formed from the businessmen and is biased toward their interests, not the country’s,” she said. “The unions have members of all spectrums of political life in Egypt, and yes, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood as well. But they are changing their mind slowly after seeing the latest decisions made by President Morsi.”

The constitution was voted down in Cairo, with 57 percent against, and in Gharbiya governorate by 52.1 percent. The largest city in Gharbiya is Mahalla El Kubra, a center of Egypt’s textile industry, with tens of thousands of factory workers and a history of union struggles and opposition to the Mubarak dictatorship and the military regime that followed.

“The vote here was a resounding ‘no,’” Ibrahim Sayed Habib, a former textile worker and currently an official of the textile workers union at Misr Textiles, told the *Militant* by phone from Mahalla.

Habib pointed to the impact of the economic crisis on workers’ opposition to the constitution. “Prices have been going up substantially,” he said. “Wage raises have been refused by the Muslim Brotherhood and the government.”

Supporters of the constitution often cited the need for “stability” to explain why they would vote in favor. But most people did not vote.

No matter how the vote turns out, workers are not about to willingly give up the political space to organize and fight for their interests that was won in struggle over the last several years.

Bashar Abu Saifan in Beirut and Georges Mehrabian in Athens, Greece, contributed to this article.

‘Militant’ holiday schedule

This issue of the *Militant* is a two-week issue, as we are taking a one-week break for the holidays. The next issue will be mailed out on Jan. 3.